

INTRODUCTION OF "OPENNESS PROMOTES EFFECTIVENESS IN OUR NATIONAL GOVERNMENT ACT OF 2007"

### HON. LAMAR SMITH

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Monday, March 5, 2007*

Mr. SMITH of Texas. Madam Speaker, today I introduced the "Openness Promotes Effectiveness in our National Government Act of 2007" (the "OPEN Government Act").

This legislation will give the public more information and better insight into the workings of government by strengthening the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

The OPEN Government Act also creates a broader definition of "news media" so that additional types of news media can obtain government documents at minimal cost.

The legislation establishes a system that assigns individualized tracking numbers to requests for information so individuals can track their requests.

I want to protect our open system of government and ensure that the Federal government responds to the American people.

Unfortunately, the process for obtaining government information is overly burdensome and federal agencies have become less and less responsive to requests for information.

This deters citizens from obtaining information to which they are entitled.

Taxpayers should have the opportunity to obtain information quickly and easily from the Federal government.

I had hoped to work with the Democrats to draft bipartisan legislation this year and we were able to compromise on several provisions of the bill.

Unfortunately, we could not come to an agreement on all provisions.

The bill I am introducing today includes provisions regarding recovery of attorneys' fees when an individual has been wrongly denied information, penalties for agencies that do not comply within the specified FOIA time limits, and additional agency reporting requirements.

However, the key issue the Democrats insisted on adding to the bill was a statutory presumption of disclosure surrounding FOIA.

It would in essence reverse the FOIA guidelines set out by former Attorney General John Ashcroft.

In 2001, then Attorney General Ashcroft established a policy that information from the government should not be provided if it was likely to threaten national security or invade personal privacy.

My bill would continue this policy and make FOIA requests subject to these national security and personal privacy concerns.

This bill makes it easier for citizens to get an answer to their requests for information. Citizens should have the opportunity to obtain information quickly and easily from the Federal government.

BICENTENNIAL OF THE BRITISH ABOLITION OF THE TRANS-ATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE—ACKNOWLEDGMENT

### HON. CHARLES B. RANGEL

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Monday, March 5, 2007*

Mr. RANGEL. Madam Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge the Bicentennial of the British Abolition of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and enter into the record an article from the *Africana Heritage* newsletter, published by the Schomburg Center for the Research in Black History and Culture entitled "Bicentennial of the American and British Abolition of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade."

On March 25, 1807, the British Parliament passed the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act. This act outlawed slave trading, granted authority to the British Royal Navy to search and seize ships, and also required payment for the freedom of slaves. This act also was a pivotal piece of legislation and eventually contributed to the full abolishment of slavery in Great Britain and in the United States.

This bicentennial offers an opportunity, for people around the world, to remember the historical significance of the slave trade and slavery as a whole. We must never forget the immeasurable human cost of slavery or the aftermath that still lingers today. Considerable progress has been made toward equality and to repair the damage caused by the British institution of slavery, but work still needs to be done in the area of race relations for people of African descent in the U.S. and abroad. The bicentennial provides us an opportunity to remember the history of our past while working toward equality today.

In March of 2007, Great Britain will begin a year long commemoration of the bicentennial in several ways. Approximately \$37.5 million has been allocated for projects. Specifically, the government is funding projects that involve education on the history of the transatlantic slave trade in schools and communities. The dedication of funding to educate people about the Trans-Atlantic slave trade is noteworthy. I applaud Great Britain for their efforts and look forward to the planning of similar events in the United States during the coming year.

BICENTENNIAL OF THE AMERICAN AND BRITISH ABOLITION OF THE TRANS-ATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE

Two hundred years ago, on March 3, 1807, President Thomas Jefferson signed into act a bill approved by Congress the day before "to prohibit the importation of slaves into any port or place within the jurisdiction of the United States." A few weeks later, on the 25th, the British House of Lords passed The Slave Trade Abolition Bill. In neither country did new legislation signify the immediate end of the international slave trade. Twenty years earlier, the Constitution of the United States (article I, section 9) had clearly spelled out that it could not be banned before 1808, and it was not until January 1, 1808 that the American and British acts went into effect.

Nevertheless, the deportation of Africans continued: legally to Brazil, and the French and Spanish colonies; and illegally to the United States and the British West Indies. Of the 12.5 million men, women, and children uprooted by the trans-Atlantic slave trade—93 percent towards South America and the

Caribbean—3.5 million were transported between 1801 and 1867.

Throughout 2007, the bicentennial of the abolition of the international slave trade will be commemorated in Great Britain—the largest slave trading country with more than 40 percent of the deportations—and Anglophone Caribbean countries with exhibitions, conferences, and other activities. About \$37.5 million have been awarded in Great Britain to various projects. The American commemoration will take place in 2008.

MAJOR MANIFESTATIONS OF THE BICENTENNIAL IN GREAT BRITAIN:

#### *Bristol*

Between 1698 and 1807, Bristol sent 2,000 slave ships to Africa. To commemorate the city's involvement in the slave trade, The Bristol Industrial Museum will propose an exhibition on the slave trade and its abolition. The British Empire and Commonwealth Museum's exhibition "Breaking the Chains" will open on February 15 and run for two years.

#### *Hull*

The Wilberforce House Museum and the Wilberforce Institute will develop and update their slavery and abolition collections. The University of Hull will organize a conference, "Slavery: Unfinished Business," on May 16-18.

#### *Liverpool*

The International Slavery Museum will open on August 23 in the city that deported 1.5 million Africans in 5,000 voyages (300 to North America), making it the first slave-trading port in Europe.

#### *London*

The Museum of London and The Museum in Docklands will present exhibitions on the role of London in the slave trade. The city—second in Europe after Bristol—sent more than 2,700 slave ships to Africa.

The Victoria and Albert Museum will have two exhibitions starting on February 20, on the impact and legacy of slavery on art.

#### *Manchester*

A partnership of 11 organizations will examine the economic, cultural, and social effects of the slave trade on Great Britain beyond the port cities in a wide-ranging project called "Revealing Histories."

#### *Portsmouth*

The Royal Naval Museum will show an exhibition on the role of the Royal Navy's Africa Squadron in the repression of the transatlantic slave trade.

#### *Warwick*

A conference, "Free at Last? Commemorating the Bicentennial Anniversary of the Abolition of the British Slave Trade," will take place from July 11 to 13.

#### *York*

The University of York will present a conference on April 12-14, "Abolitions, 1807-2007: Ending the Slave Trade in the Atlantic World."

#### *Conference in Ghana*

From August 8th to the 12th, the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture (Virginia), UNESCO, the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History (Yale), the W. E. B. Du Bois Institute (Harvard), the Reed Foundation, and the Wilberforce Institute will convene an international conference, "The bloody Writing is for ever torn: Domestic and International Consequences of the First Governmental Efforts to Abolish the Atlantic Slave Trade."